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ABSTRACT

A five-week tutorial minicourse offered by the Douglas/Cook College Writing Center at Rutgers University helps students develop skills in research writing. The first service the Writing Center offers is a "term paper strategy session," in which students meet with a reference librarian to examine the various reference sources available. Students may then return to the writing center for help with notetaking or organizing and revising their papers. The center also offers a "visiting tutor" program, in which a staff member and a librarian visit classes before students begin the research process. Using an experimental group and a control group of students from two sections of a course taught by the same instructor and given the same research assignment, the writing center assistant director and a reference librarian conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of this joint approach. When the final papers were evaluated on an analytical scale it was found that the experimental group, which had been visited by writing center staff and had met with a librarian, produced papers that were better written and contained better research material than those of the control group, which had not received special instruction. The course was so successful that the center plans to expand the program to reach a greater number of students. (Appendixes with the analytical grading scale and a questionnaire given to writing center students are included.) (HTH)

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The Writing Center and the Library:

Teaching the Research Paper

Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 26, 1981

by

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Every semester teachers of writing hear their colleagues in every discipline complain that students do not know how to write research papers. When asked to identify their students' specific problems, they note four areas: lack of a clear thesis or focus, lack of specific evidence, lack of organization, and lack of research skills. To teachers of writing, these four problems areas are not new; we have been addressing them ever since freshman composition was first "invented". Recently, however, the staff of the Douglass/Cook College Writing Center (Rutgers University) decided to investigate new approaches to teaching these skills, and, as a result, we have developed three programs for students who need help writing research papers.

One way students can obtain help in writing research papers is to enroll in a one credit five week tutorial minicourse in "Advanced Writing" skills. In this course students work on advanced writing projects such as: business writing, scientific writing, creative writing, research writing. The majority of students who register for this course do so in order to work on research writing. Students working on research skills meet with a tutor to discuss researching, note-taking, organizing and writing.

This five week minicourse has been very successful. Faculty members notice improvement in the papers of students who have come to the Writing Center. Students, too, have indicated

their approval of the program by signing up for it in ever-increasing numbers. One disadvantage of this program is the number of students it can reach. Since this minicourse runs for five weeks, and the students usually meet one-on-one with a tutor, the number of advanced writing students this program can accommodate is very limited. Also, this course is not open to everyone. In order to take the "Advanced Writing Skills" minicourse, a student must submit a writing sample and demonstrate a proficiency in basic composition skills. The Writing Center staff, therefore, developed two other services in order to reach a greater number of students.

Since writing a research paper covers two main areas, researching and writing, we decided to work with the reference librarians to help students produce better research papers.

The first service we offer in conjunction with the reference librarians is a "Term Paper Strategy Session," which is open to all students at Douglass and Cook colleges. When students working on research papers come to the Writing Center as drop-in students (those not enrolled in one of our regularly scheduled 1 or 1.5 credit courses), we first arrange strategy session appointments for them with a reference librarian.

At a "Term Paper Strategy Session" students meet with a librarian whose area of subject expertise best corresponds to

their paper topic. At the session the librarian and the students examine various reference sources--encyclopedias, card catalog, periodic indexes and abstracts, vertical file materials, and government documents--for subjects that pertain to their topics. The sources are discussed in relation to a general research strategy which may be elementary or more advanced depending on the level of information needed.[1]

After drop-in students have attended a strategy session, they may elect to return to the Writing Center for help on note-taking, or they may return when they are ready to write the paper. A Writing Center tutor then discusses the content and organization of their papers with them. The tutor never does any of the writing for the students, but asks leading questions and offers suggestions about revising and editing.

In addition to the "Term Paper Strategy Session", the Writing Center and library staff members work together on a "Visiting Tutor" program. A staff member and librarian visit classes in which research papers have been assigned and talk to the class before they begin the researching-writing process.

The Writing Center staff member spends one period in the classroom explaining the writing process in general and specific techniques for note-taking and writing the research paper. Basically, he/she addresses three of the four main areas which the classroom teachers have identified as problematic: developing

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[1]My thanks to Amy Dykeman and Andrèe Malone, reference librarians at the Mabel Smith Douglass Library, for their description of a strategy session.

a focus, providing evidence, organizing material. The librarian gives instruction on the fourth problem--research skills. In addition, the writing specialist emphasizes the necessity of scheduling time for the writing process and recommends several research writing handbooks.

At a separate class meeting, students visit the library, and a reference librarian explains ways in which information is organized in the library and how to find research materials which apply directly to their course. Also, the structure of the library system is discussed so that they can do further research on their own. This includes a discussion of: the union catalog, the union list of serials, intra and inter library loan, the vertical file, and the media center's reference section.

This year a reference librarian, Amy Dykeman, and I decided to conduct a study to determine the effectiveness of this joint effort. In the fall of 1980, forty-six undergraduates enrolled in "Sociology of the Family" at Douglass College participated in a study on teaching the research paper. Although Douglass College is a women's college, there were two males in the experimental group and one male in the control group. These males were Rutgers College undergraduates. Both the control and the experimental groups were sections of "Sociology of the Family" which were taught by the same instructor. The course content was the same for both sections, and the research paper assignment was presented identically in both sections.

After the paper was assigned, the experimental section was visited once by a member of the College's Writing Center staff. This staff member presented a lesson on the writing process and explained the format to be used in writing research papers.

This group also met with a reference librarian for one class period. The librarian reviewed basic research techniques and explained where to find and how to use specific sources in sociology.

The control group received no special instruction in writing or researching; however, the college library and Writing Center facilities are available to all students.

At the end of the semester, the research papers were evaluated on an analytical scale (see Appendix A) by two trained readers. The results are presented in Table One.

TABLE ONE

Mean Scores from Analytical Scoring of Research Papers

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Overall Mean	121.88	115.36
Subgroup Writing Skills Mean Score	70.67	67.82
Subgroup Research Skills Mean Score	52.17	47.18
	n = 24	n = 22

Both groups were assured that the results of the scoring would not affect their grades for the course; in fact, the instructor did not receive the results from the researchers until the class grades were already submitted for the term.

The experimental group received a total mean score of 121.88 and the control group 115.36. The experimental group also scored higher on the writing skills subsection of the analytical scale with a score of 70.67 as compared to 67.82 for the control group. The experimental group also scored higher in research skills with an overall mean of 52.17 as compared to 47.18 for the control group. Although there is not more than a six point difference between the mean scores, it must be remembered that these scores represent a small population (46 students). The scores do indicate, however, that the experimental group produced papers which were found to be better written and contained better research material.

Both the experimental and control sections of "Sociology of the Family" were also asked to complete a questionnaire about their research and writing practices. Sixteen students in the experimental and fourteen in the control group responded. All respondents indicated that they discussed their topics for the paper with someone before writing. Concerning sources used, it is interesting to note that the students in the experimental group used a greater variety of sources than those in the control group (see Appendix B).* It is also important to note that the control group students had greater difficulty

locating material. The experimental students, as compared to the control students, reported finding fewer gaps in their notes which they had to research again.

Concerning the students' writing of their papers, responses to the questionnaire reveal that although students in both groups reported taking notes and outlining, the students in the experimental group did more listing of topics to help organize their material. In addition, the experimental students reported writing a greater number of drafts before submitting the finished paper. In both groups, about half the respondents reported that they had someone else read the paper before they submitted it. Their readers were classmates, friends, or family members.

The third page of the questionnaire was only completed by students in the experimental group because it asked questions about the classroom presentations of the Writing Center staff member and the reference librarian. The vast majority reported that the lessons given by the Writing Specialist and reference librarian were helpful in producing a better research paper, and they further indicated that they would recommend the services offered by the Writing Center and the Library to other students.

TABLE TWO

Variety of Sources Consulted

Types of* Sources Used	Control	Experimental
one	1	0
two	6	0
three	2	8
more than three	5	7
	14 Student responses	15 Student responses

*This corresponds to item number 5 in the questionnaire in Appendix B.

We are encouraged by the results of this study. It has been hypothesized that one reason for the success of these programs is that the instruction on research writing is given when it is needed. Although the material we cover is often covered in freshman composition, it is usually presented at a time when students have not yet decided on a major. It is often taught in isolation, not in connection with a course in which the research paper is an important aid in teaching course content (and a course requirement). Also, when a writing specialist and reference librarian visit a classroom in any discipline to discuss research writing, we are "Visiting Experts". Students are more attentive to instruction given by an "expert" who visits for only one period because it offers a change from the usual classroom routine.

Although our one credit five week tutorial minicourse has been very successful for three years, it can only accommodate a limited number of clients. Next fall we plan to continue this

course, but we are going to expand our offerings. We plan to offer a special research writing section for the non-traditional adult learner. In addition, we are going to make our joint "Visiting Tutor Program" more accessible for the entire faculty. All of this should make it possible for us to reach a greater number of students each semester; and, we hope, reduce the number of times we hear our colleagues say, "Why can't students write research papers?"

Appendix A

Analytical Scoring Guide for Research Papers

Student's number_____ Group #_____ Date_____

Content	Low	Middle	High	Score
Clearly restricted thesis (focused)	2	4	6	_____
Specific, convincing evidence	2	4	6	_____
Organization				
Purposeful introduction	2	4	6	_____
Logical development	2	4	6	_____
Sound conclusions	2	4	6	_____
Writing				
Sentence structure	2	4	6	_____
Diction, usage, syntax	2	4	6	_____
Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization)	2	4	6	_____
Research Paper Mechanics				
Footnote form	2	4	6	_____
Bibliography form	2	4	6	_____
Documentation				
Adequate number of sources	2	4	6	_____
Use of material by recognized authorities	2	4	6	_____
				_____
Scholarly journals used	2	4	6	_____
Variety of sources	2	4	6	_____

Appendix B

COURSE: "Sociology Of The Family"

STUDENT NUMBER:

CLASS PERIOD:

DATE: Fall, 1980

Responses
C = Control
E = Experimental

DIRECTIONS: For each item below, check as many answers under each question that apply.

1. What is your current enrollment status?

C	E	
1	0	1. Freshman
4	6	2. Sophmore
7	5	3. Junior
2	5	4. Senior
0	0	5. Other

2. What is your field of study?

7	7	1. Sociology
2	4	2. Other area of the Social Sciences
3	2	3. Humanities
0	0	4. Sciences
1	3	5. Other (Specify: C: Nutrition / E: Kinetics, Communications, Art)
1	0	6. Undecided

3. When you planned your term paper for "Sociology of the Family", did you discuss your selection of a topic with:

9	9	1. the instructor
7	10	2. a classmate or friend
2	2	3. a librarian
1	1	4. someone in the Writing Center
2	3	5. other (Specify: E: counselor, parent / 2- mother, 1- expert in field)
0	0	6 noone

4. While researching this paper, did you:

10	10	1. ask a librarian
1	1	2. sign up for a Library Strategy Session
1	1	3. go to the Writing Center
3	5	4. none of the above

5. What sources did you check for this paper?

14	16	1. the card catalog
1	4	2. an encyclopedia
4	12	3. Sociological Abstracts
2	4	4. Social Sciences Index
3	2	5. N.Y. Times Index
6	8	6. Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature
7	6	7. bibliographies
3	7	8. vertical file
3	4	9. Government documents

6. Did you have a problem finding enough material for your topic?

C	E	
4	8	1. Yes
10	13	2. No

7. Did you have trouble locating:

6	4	1. books
5	2	2. journal articles
0	1	3. other (Specify: Doctoral Dissertations)
4	10	4 no trouble

E

8. Would you like to know more about how to use the Library?

10	10	1. Yes
2	3	2. No
	3	3 No answer

9. While planning this paper, did you:

9	13	1. take notes and keep a list of courses
9	12	2. write an outline before starting the paper
9	8	3. write notes to yourself on how you might organize the paper
8	13	4. make a list of general topics to include in the paper
8	14	5. start writing the first draft from your notes

10. While writing this paper, did you:

7	2	1. write one draft
5	13	2. write two drafts
2	1	3. write three drafts
0	0	4. write more than three drafts

11. While writing the paper, did you find gaps and have to go back and do more research?

7	2	1. Yes
7	13	2. No
0	1	No Answer

12. After writing this paper, did you edit it (clear up the grammar, punctuation, etc.) before typing it?

14	16	1. Yes
0	0	2. No

13. While writing this paper, did you have someone else read it:

A. Before you typed it?			B. After you typed it?		
11	4	1. Yes	8	6	1. Yes
3	12	2. No	6	9	2. No
			4	1	No answer

14. If you answered "Yes" above, was this person:

		1. the instructor
10	7	2. a classmate or friend
		3. another teacher
1	1	4. someone at the Writing Center
3	4	5. other (Specify: family members)
3	4	6. no one

15. Did you find the presentation given by the Writing Center specialist helpful for writing this paper?

14 1. Yes
1 2. No
1 3. Did not attend the seminar

16. Would you consider using the Writing Center or recommending it to someone else for help in writing a research paper?

13 1. Yes
0 2. No
3 3. No opinion

17. Did you find the reference Librarian's talk on research materials useful in researching this paper?

12 1. Yes
0 2. No
2 3. Did not attend the session
2 No answer

18. Would you recommend consulting a Librarian for help with a paper in the future?

13 1. Yes
0 2. No
3 3. No Answer